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Sport is the Thing

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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In the face of the oozing cesspool of stories of corruption, crime, and cheating in sport filling the various forms of media, there is a danger that the reason people are drawn to sport will get lost in the muck. We love sport because it reveals the high levels of achievement that can be attained by humans, it offers the excitement and drama of competition, and at times it reaches the sublime. We need to keep reminding ourselves of this simple truth.

At certain times on the calendar the volume and quality of sport on offer to fans and competitors alike overflows the capacity for any single person to absorb. It is an embarrassment of riches and at present we are in the midst of one such bonanza of events.

Where to begin?

The two major professional sports in the United States are nearing the end of the playoff season. The NBA has given us play at the highest level of skill and competition. The record breaking season for the Golden State Warriors has only added to the drama of the postseason. The competition offered by the San Antonio Spurs, the Oklahoma City Thunder, Golden State, and the Cleveland Cavaliers has been compelling.

For those who follow the NBA this has been a post-season of high drama and excitement driven by the play of the best basketball players in the world. Great players reaching their highest levels and great teams offering team play punctuated with magical passing, deadly shooting accuracy, and high quality defense have been on display night after night. The play of Curry, Thompson, James, Durant, Westbrook and many more has been truly special.

The NHL playoffs too have produced great drama. There is nothing quite like sudden death overtime and game sevens in the NHL. The required level of human effort is exhausting just to watch, and even allowing for the relaxation of the rules the skill levels, finesse and muscle seen in the NHL playoffs is worth every tick of the clock. On the verge of winning the Stanley Cup the Pittsburgh Penguins have exhibited high energy coupled with the superb skills of Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin and their supporting cast. Top that off with hot goal tending by Matt Murray and that is a formula for winning the Stanley Cup. On the

wider stage at the World Championships in St. Petersburg much of the same was on display.

If all of this is not enough, or simply not what moves you, then perhaps tennis is the answer. The French Open, although plagued by bad weather, offered plenty of drama culminating with the finals. On the women's side Serena Williams was seeking to add further to her career list of Grand Slam championships. It did not happen but with Serena, win or lose, when she is on the court drama and great tennis is seldom lacking. She is the greatest player of all-time and to see her play anytime anywhere is a great opportunity for those who love sport.

On the men's side history was made as Novak Djokovic secured the career grand slam, set up the possibility of a traditional Grand Slam, and now holds all four Grand Slam championships at one time. This latter achievement has been done only three times in history, by Don Budge in 1938 and Rod Laver in 1962 and 1969. Having won the first two Grand Slams of the season, Djokovic is now in position to complete the cycle with victories at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open.

In the middle of this magnificent array of plays and players, the Triple Crown of horse racing is unfolding. The Kentucky Derby is always one of the highlights of the late spring. The pageantry, the high fashion, and the tradition, make the "greatest two minutes in sport" one of the must see events on the sports calendar. When Nyquist became only the eighth undefeated horse to ever win the Derby the fans were poised for a second consecutive Triple Crown winner. It was not to be as Exaggerator won the Preakness and Nyquist finished a disappointing third and will not run in the final leg at Belmont Park. This of course only adds to the mystique of the Triple Crown reminding race fans of what a rare achievement this is.

For soccer fans the Copa America is taking place for the first time in the United States, generating considerable excitement for the growing number of soccer fans in this country. Those fans were also entertained by the conclusion of the English Premier League season with the improbable championship by the Leicester City Foxes. However the major event will start Friday in France as Euro 2016 opens its month long run of high level football and nationalist intensity as twenty-four nations compete for the European Football Championship.

For auto racing fans Memorial Day weekend means the Indy 500 which will be followed in about six weeks by the second big race

of the season in Daytona. Also on wheels the Tour de France will arrive in July.

For golfers the U.S. Open begins in less than two weeks and The Open comes in July as well.

To top it off we have now reached the first milestone of the baseball season, Memorial Day, when serious baseball fans make their first assessment of the course of the season. The major story of course is the run that the Chicago Cubs are making. Loaded with young talented players, very good pitching, a nice mix of veteran players, and led by their unorthodox manager Joe Maddon, Cub fans are beginning to dream that this may finally be "next year."

Oh, and yes, this is an Olympic year!

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau remind you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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